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**Ambassador Robert D. McCallum, Jr.  
Remarks at the Australian Forward Air Controller's  
Medal Presentation Ceremony  
April 24, 2008**

Air Marshall Douglas Riding, Air Vice Marshall Graham Neil, Air Commodore Geoff Brown, Air Commodore Ian Pearson, Australian and American Forward Air Controllers, Veterans and members of the United States and Australian military, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my distinct honor to represent the President of the United States of America today as we recognize these brave Australian Airmen who served the cause of freedom with remarkable distinction in conjunction with US Army and Air Forces in Vietnam over the years 1964 through 1972. This recognition of these men's valor is long over-due. United States military medals could not be awarded at that time under then existing Australian government policy which followed an old United Kingdom military tradition.

Thankfully, the policy changed in recent times and, while it is a long time coming, today's ceremony and medal presentation is as heartfelt and significant a tribute by my country to these men as if it had been held 35 years ago.

Today's ceremony is a simple one, befitting the type of men these "FACs" are. Medals and formality are generally the last things on their minds. It was recognition enough that they were widely acknowledged –in our military and in their own – as men who were given a difficult job and who did it exceedingly well -- at great peril to themselves and at great benefit to their fellow soldiers. When duty called, they answered, accepting assignment to US forces in Vietnam, not as the fighter pilots they were, but as Forward Air Controllers, a mission for which most of them had only briefly trained, if they had trained for it at all.

Many air power historians claim that Australian Defence Forces pioneered the concept of forward air controllers beginning in World War I while serving with the Royal Air Force in Palestine and then in their own right in the south west Pacific campaigns of World War II. Whatever the history, in the Vietnam Conflict, the FAC was the vital link between the bombers in the air and the US, South Vietnamese, and Australian soldiers on the ground.

Necessity is often the mother of invention, and their Australian practicality and creativity was evident as they developed their tactics and procedures, building upon this prior Aussie legacy and tradition. Often flying alone in their small Cessna O-1 Birddogs, O-2's or North American OV-10 Broncos, FACs were a welcome presence in the skies of Indochina. Hearing the voice of a "Tamale" or "Covey" on the radio meant help and support was on the way to allied troops in combat on the ground, and hearing the faint hum of the small prop engine of the FAC's aircraft must have sent dread through the heart of the enemy. Unarmed, the FACs stayed above their troops ensuring fighter planes and bombers knew where to put their ordnance. Lives were at stake, and the FACs made a world of difference. Many Americans GIs and Marines and many Australian diggers were able to grow old with their families thanks to the skill and bravery of the FACs such as the men we are honoring today.

Serving up to 8 month tours, these pilots often lived with and got to know the troops that they supported. The Australian FACs flew in support of US Army units operating in the Delta region of then-South Vietnam as well as Australian units as they vectored in Canberra bombers of the Royal Australian Air Force number 2 squadron. Frequently

under fire, only one of the 36 Australian FACs was shot down. Thankfully, he was rescued.

The example set by the Australian and US forward air controllers in Vietnam and the innovations they devised are now reflected in the fantastic air-to-ground coordination employed by our joint forces today. Once again, in today's conflicts, Australian and American military forces are operating as if they are one, continuing the tradition of our great alliance. Therefore, it is appropriate to close by recognizing the contributions of all those present here today, both Australian and US veterans, who through their significant service in the Vietnam Conflict so ably served the cause of freedom. It is a privilege for me to present to you all, particularly to the Australian airmen, the thanks of the President of the United States and the thanks of my grateful nation.